DEPARTMENT OF STATE CLIMATE AND ATMOSPHERIC PROGRAMS

The Department of State (DOS) plays an active role in international climate/meteorological policy making as a result of the growing worldwide concern with global environmental issues, including the depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer and climate change. The role of DOS has principally revolved around preparation and negotiation of the United States position in three fora: (1) the Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, (2) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); and (3) negotiation under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

Stratospheric ozone depletion has been recognized as a critical health and environmental problem for more than a decade. Under Department of State (DOS) leadership, the United States worked to negotiate international agreements to phase out ozone-depleting substances, which should lead to a recovery of the ozone layer in the next century. To date, these treaties have been signed and ratified by more than 170 countries (including the United States). These countries represent 99 percent of the world's production of ozone depleting substances.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is jointly sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), held its first session in 1988. This organization serves as a government forum to assess the state of scientific and technical information regarding climate change. In doing so, the Panel draws on the expertise of thousands of scientists and technical experts. The IPCC is currently organized in three working groups, examining: (1) the state of the science, (2) impacts and adaptation, and (3) mitigation. The IPCC released its first and second assessment reports in 1990 and 1995, respectively, and a third assessment report from each of the working groups was published in 2001. The fourth assessment report, due in 2007, is currently under preparation. In addition to preparing assessment reports, the IPCC also contributed to international negotiations through preparation and review of special reports and development of methodologies requested by the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

The FCCC was negotiated beginning in February 1991; the Convention was open for signature in Rio de Janeiro at the Earth Summit in June 1992. As of May 2004, it had been ratified by 189 countries, including the United States. The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention was held in Berlin in March/April 1995. The Convention calls for all countries to develop inventories of their emissions and sinks of greenhouse gases and calls upon developed countries and economies in transition to aim to return these emissions to their 1990 levels by the year 2000.

In December 1997, Parties to the Convention reached agreement on the Kyoto Protocol, which establishes targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries and countries with economies in transition. The Kyoto Protocol does not currently have the requisite level of participation to have entered into force. Although the United States will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the United States is actively engaged in addressing climate change through the Convention, through international science and technology initiatives, such as the Earth Observation Initiative, the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum, the International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy, Generation IV (a U.S.-led program working on new fission reactor designs that will be safer, more economical and secure), and through bilateral partnerships with Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, and other countries. These initiatives will improve the capability to understand and address issues associated with climate change in a manner that supports broader sustainable development goals.

In addition to its primary role in the fora listed above, DOS is active in several relevant interagency processes, including the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (CENR) of the National Science and Technology Council and the Interagency Working Group on Climate Change Science and Technology (IWGCCST). The CENR was established in 1993 to coordinate scientific domestic programs. Created in 2002, the IWGCCST is a sub-Cabinet level group that reviews all programs that contribute to climate change science and technology. Furthermore, while the emphasis on global environmental issues is a key new component of the department's focus, traditional DOS responsibilities, described in earlier Federal plans, continue. These include, but are not limited to, international aspects of food policy, disaster warnings and assistance, WMO and UNEP activities, and international meteorological programs.